

## **BHNA General Meeting Minutes February, 2014**

Speaker: Kenneth Chin, Public Works

Topic: Re-Engineering of Transportation via the Sustainable Streets Plan

The meeting started at 7:30 p.m. 26 people signed in, including the following Board members: Susan Rowinski, Andrea McCutchin, Lisa Taner, Ellen Wang, Heinz Plischke, and Kaye Sharma.

Susan Rowinski hosted the meeting, and opened by introducing the new BHNA Board to the audience. She also advised that Laurel School would have a fundraiser with an Electronic Waste Day on March 15th from 9 - 3 p.m.

Susan continued with the three upcoming general meeting topics for March, April and May. In March, Speaker Darcy Foresell would update us about city goings-on, including high density apartments, Hillsdale Mall, the Grand Boulevard Initiative. In April, Sheila Canzian will speak about the upgrades anticipated for Beresford Park, and also about other city parks. In May, Michael Svanevik will give us a history of our city, specifically the BHNA region.

Speaker Ken Chin was then introduced and discussed that the city was looking to balance its growth with the quality of life we currently enjoy here, also with consideration to the needs of our aging population. Ken went on to discuss that our city evolved by starting off as a stagecoach stop, with a mission in the area - then growth occurred with the advent of the trolley, and the occurrence of the 1906 earthquake, which brought a population of San Franciscans down to San Mateo. Our northern downtown area was settled first with more high density buildings. The end of WWII also brought growth, with a push for housing that would also accommodate vehicles. This was the beginning of our 'car culture.' The city is now in process of fighting this culture to find a better balance.

An audience member asked if we were going to become the next San Francisco considering the growth that is planned. Susan and other members of the audience corrected the mayor's misstatement (of 30,000 homes) from the previous meeting with the proper figure of 10,000 residences.

Ken asked for a show of hands for folks who lived west of the Alameda and east of the Alameda, as his subject would impact these areas differently. It was about a 50/50 split.

Ken discussed that the planned infrastructure change would be more pedestrian and bike friendly. He talked about our aging population and how the average age that men stop driving is 72, and women are 78.

Ken defined SUSTAINABLE STREETS as being two-pronged: Complete Streets, which are streets that are safe, comfortable and convenient for all users (including bikes, pedestrians, cars and transit), and Green Streets, which incorporates green infrastructure to manage storm water, make streets more walkable and aesthetically appealing.

A number of master plans were already underway, including the Bike Master Plan and Pedestrian Master Plan. The Sustainable Streets Plan continues the work of all the others.

Ken defined Level of Service, which is how the city analyzes intersections for traffic impact. They have an "A through F" scoring, where "A" represents no delay in the intersection, and "F" means there is stop and go traffic. San Mateo currently has a grade of "D." One of the ways to improve intersections is to make them bigger. This also prioritizes the public right of way.

Ken asked if anyone had heard of their program "Taste & Talk." This city program hosts speakers from around the nation to discuss Sustainable Streets, and is intended to involve our community. The programs are recorded and can be seen on the city web site. Also on the site ([www.sustainablestreetsanmateo.com](http://www.sustainablestreetsanmateo.com)) are dates for upcoming "Taste & Talk" programs. These programs are part of the second year of this 2 year project for the city, which involve public outreach and development.

Why should anyone care about this program, Ken asked. Because everyone wins. It provides for all users. 21% of people don't drive. There are health benefits to fewer cars and a more active lifestyle. Safety will increase. In 2012, San Mateo experienced its highest pedestrian fatality numbers.

This program considers some of the following:

- as vehicle speed increases, drivers focus less on their surroundings
- higher speeds equal a higher percentage for injury/death
- similar programs show an 88% reduction in pedestrian fatalities
- less pollution due to fewer cars (noise and gas emissions) improves the environment
- 50% of people travel less than 3 miles when they get in their cars; 28% travel less than a mile

Complete Streets does the following:

- changes intersection design
- includes bike lanes
- changes transit markings
- changes accessibility (curb ramps)

There are many types of Complete Streets, and not every street benefits from this. It depends on the street. Different streets may or may not require different improvements.

The "toolbox" for Complete Streets includes sidewalks (with a big enough width to have zones considering pedestrians), buffers and landscaping.

Green Streets is a win/win as it provides a landscape buffer which also helps naturally filter storm water. Burlingame Avenue now has Green Streets with their current upgrade.

Other changes that will help include high visibility markings for crossing areas, and tools like "Shark teeth" (advance yield signs) warning drivers of an upcoming crosswalk. Other tools include LED strobe beacons at crosswalks for higher compliance, and angled crosswalks so pedestrians are forced to turn their bodies to face traffic before they cross to see oncoming cars. Curb extensions are also useful as there would be less time walking in a crosswalk (when that crosswalk is shorter). Curb extensions can also incorporate green streets.

Bike lanes would improve in varying ways. There are buffered examples for higher safety, such as colorized lanes (going in at Polhemus & DeAnza), shared lanes with cars (where bikes have rights to the full lane, too), and cycle tracks where bikes and pedestrians are next to each other. More bike parking will also be installed.

Road Diets will take place, where 4 lanes of roads (two in one direction, and two in the other) would be reduced down to three lanes, where the middle lane would become a turn lane. This has recently been done at Delaware near KMart, and there has been no traffic congestion due to this.

Roundabouts will also be used and will result in a huge safety increase. It forces cars to slow at the approach, accommodates the same number of vehicles at a time, and there are fewer points of conflict for car versus car, or car versus pedestrian.

Laurel Elementary was chosen as a pilot project for the Safe Routes to School program and will receive green streets, an improved lot with a new entry for drop-off, along with a crosswalk on Hacienda at the block halfway point. This will be done before the end of the summer. The Beresford neighborhood will see more improvements before other areas of the city.

An audience member asked why roundabouts didn't come to the west as they are more predominant in the east. Ken believes it is due to the bigger car culture we have here, which popularized the signaled intersections. Another audience member added that Stanford is installing a roundabout.

Previously, the city was limited in what it could do on El Camino since Cal Trans was able to dictate that. But since they are working together on this project, everything is open to new options.

An audience person asked how the city would pay to maintain the greenery in green streets. Ken answered that funds currently paying to maintain streets (paid to Public Works) would be shifted to Parks/Rec who will maintain the medians since these green areas would replace the Public Works areas. Though greenery installed at schools would be maintained by the schools.

An audience member asked if most of the program emphasis would be downtown and wondered if the other schools in the area would be viewed for the Safe Routes program. Ken advised that our district is quite large with 15 schools. Each one would require about \$50k - \$100k, but they are being reviewed for pedestrian and bike safety and recommendations will be made. The city is looking into grants and other funding for these Safe Routes improvements.

Ken followed up to answer that the emphasis is not just on downtown. However 2/3 of the collisions occur there - but only so many improvements may be made. There are 81 signals and all will be upgraded from the current cycle to a computerized signal which can perform intervals which should result in a 50% crash reduction. North central neighborhoods are getting pedestrian projects, Hacienda just completed its pedestrian project, and 20th Avenue, the Bel-Mateo area and the Grand Boulevard Initiatives are also on tap.

Another question asked was wouldn't we need new roads with the increase of population and cars. Ken said studies show that widening or creating new roads does not help - in one year they are congested again. He said a grid network of roads is shown to be best, and that is what we have in our city. Promoting walking and biking will help. When the city of Portland truly invested in bike lanes, their ridership increased greatly. Our upcoming generation doesn't want to be stuck in cars. Their communication and freedom are their phone - which they can not use while they are driving. Car use will be reduced.

A person commented that where growth happens it is critical for these planning measures (Complete Streets). Ken noted most growth will occur along El Camino Real/train, so it will impact the city less than if it were all over.

A biker noted that Palo Alto has some roads for bikes where cars are not allowed, and that dedicated bike lanes to protect bikers from cars would be good. Possible? Ken said yes, but not now. As the bike master plan evolves, more of the following will occur: bicycle boulevards, barriers for protected bike lanes, day use bike lockers at train station, and a bike share program. All these things take time to build into the timeline.

A person asked if a train underpass would be built at 4th and El Camino. Ken said no. Someone else talked about buses holding up traffic and Ken advised the new signals would help buses go through more quickly. A person also commented that we do not have good public transportation here - it took said person one hour to get from BHNA area to Central area. He wondered if our improvements would do any good without first improving our public transportation. Ken said that it is a "Which Came First? The Chicken or the Egg" problem. We have to move forward in one area or the other. Currently, bus service is dwindling because ridership is down. Buses are subsidized, and transit providers need more people to keep things viable. Less ridership caused the discontinuation of express buses. The city has no control over SamTrans. The audience person then commented that we are 'trapped' in our cars.

In regard to jobs and housing balance in our city, Ken said we were pretty even. We do need options like car sharing, and should perhaps require things like that from new developments.

Another questions was about the lack of bike racks in some areas, like 25th Avenue. Ken said that things ARE changing, and that 30 - 40 racks are slated to be put in downtown and on 25th Avenue (the 2-bike, toaster or U-rack kind).

Ken invited people to contact him at 650-522-7313, and that he was available to ask questions post-meeting since the meeting time was coming to an end. Susan thanked Ken and the meeting ended at 9 p.m.